

THE MARTYR OF LETTERS

'J'ai la vie en haine.'

Flaubert.

if the Muse had whispered to the young
Flaubert in
his teens: 'You love me? Take care. If you
make me your
mistress, though you will have the money to
be idle, you
will find no rest. Though you long to see the
world, you
will moulder like a hermit in a cell. To me
you will
sacrifice the only woman that will love you—
your heart,
your health of body, your peace of mind.
You will go
to the grave "weary", in your own words,
"to the very
marrow"; not looking for any reward in
another world
(you will not believe in that) nor for any
paper immortal-
ity in this (you will not believe in that
either). Even in
me you will only half believe. You will
blaspheme me
often. Take care before you choose'—even if
the Muse
had whispered that, no doubt the young
Flaubert would
have none the less pursued his destiny, with
his usual
mixture of rage and resignation. It is not the
sort of life
that Sophocles would have accepted, or
Horace, or Mont-
aigne, or Goethe. It is not an easy life to
understand, this
drowning of a man's whole universe in his
inkpot, this
slow suicide on the point of his own pen,
while one half
of him called the other half a fool for it. But
it is worth
an effort to understand it. Seldom, indeed,
has a life been
either duller or stranger. And bound up
with its story

is the whole question of the proper place of literature in life.

The latest and largest edition of Flaubert's *Letters* has now reached its final volume. Few books are more self-revealing than this correspondence of just over half a century; but if the writer's features stand out so clearly